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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HANOI 000672

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [ECON](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KCOR](#) [KPAO](#) [SOCI](#) [PREL](#) [VM](#)
SUBJECT: ARRESTED JOURNALISTS PAWNS IN CPV POWER STRUGGLE

REF: A. HANOI 569

[1](#)B. HANOI 563
[1](#)C. 07 HANOI 778

HANOI 00000672 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: DCM Jon Aloisi for Reasons 1.4 (B and D)

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: While contacts report that state-controlled media outlets have been ordered to cease reporting the story, outrage over the arrest of two journalists who broke a major corruption scandal in 2006 continues. At a Swedish Embassy-organized "Dialogue on Anti-Corruption" attended by scores of diplomats, GVN officials, development experts and members of the local and international press, Ambassador Michalak called for more transparency in the case. Well-placed contacts say people are right to question the arrests, but hold that the story is part of a larger power struggle taking place behind the scenes. Our contacts offer differing views of exactly who is behind the arrests; one says it serves Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung's interests for Vietnam's elites and public to conclude that General Secretary Nong Duc Manh ordered the arrests and is protecting the former Vice Minister of Transportation who oversaw PMU-18. The Politburo reportedly met secretly while Manh was in Africa last month and again broached the idea of having one leader serve as both General Secretary and President -- a power play that was successfully scuttled by Manh's supporters. No matter who at the top gets the upper hand in this still unfolding drama, the real losers will remain the two journalists. End Summary.

Background: Coverage Quashed to Limit Public Outrage

[1](#)2. (SBU) Last month, a Ministry of Public Security (MPS) unit arrested journalists Nguyen Van Hai and Nguyen Van Chien for "abusing power" in connection to their reports on the 2006 Project Management Unit Number 18 (PMU-18) scandal. Hai and Chien work, respectively, at the Young Age ("Tuoi Tre") and Youth ("Thanh Nien") newspapers. For two days after the arrests, the two home papers of these journalists reacted with angry headlines and editorials, saying it was "unclear" what laws the journalists broke and questioning why the Government of Vietnam (GVN) arrested them more than two years after they ran their PMU-18 stories (Refs A and B).

[1](#)3. (C) Vice Director of Vietnam Entertainment and Communication Phan Le Khoi, who is close to many state-controlled media editors, told us that, after the two days of heavy criticism, the Ministry of Culture and Information issued an order to Vietnamese media outlets to cease and desist reporting on the arrests story. These outlets have obeyed the order, although some bloggers continue to pound away. Khoi told Poloff that, because

senior Party leaders have an interest in "not provoking any more public outrage" over the arrests story, the GVN will release the two journalists "soon."

Smoke and Mirrors

¶4. (C) In explaining the rationale behind the journalists' arrests, our contacts say they are "pawns" in a broader power struggle among Party heavyweights. On June 4, Le Dang Doanh, a retired economist who served as an adviser to Phan Van Dong (Communist Vietnam's first Prime Minister) and Nguyen Van Linh (the General Secretary who ushered in the "doi moi" reforms), on June 4 told the Ambassador that Hai and Chien are "victims of a political game." Someone behind the scenes has tried to embarrass Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung and "jeopardize" his visit to the United States, he said. Doanh maintained that PM Dung did not know that the MPS was going to arrest the two journalists. However, Doan